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The Influence of Emotional Customer Reviews on Perceived Usefulness, Credibility, and Booking Intention

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Abstract

The increased utilization of the internet has led to digital booking platforms gaining a great amount of popularity among travelers, because of their easy accessibility, increased convenience, and associated lower costs. As customers of the hospitality and tourism industry are purchasing intangible or experiential products, they heavily rely on online reviews for evaluating a hotel and its potential alternatives. These online reviews are a form of electronic word of mouth (eWOM), which is beneficial for both consumers during the information searching and alternative evaluation stage of their purchasing decision process, and for marketers when developing a digital marketing strategy, making it a highly interesting and relevant topic to investigate. Extensive research on eWOM and online booking platforms already exists, however, very few have focused on how specific emotional words embedded within online customer reviews influence users' perception of usefulness and credibility. This thesis aims to answer how positively, negative, and neutrally valanced emotional words in online reviews influence the perception of usefulness and credibility, and how, in turn, this potentially affects people's booking intention.

An online experiment tested how respondents perceive the credibility and usefulness of an online review, while also asking them how likely they are to book a given hotel, based on the review they read. The experiment consisted of three groups that each received an exemplar online review from a hotel in Vienna, which either included positive emotional words, negative emotional words, or a mixture of both, which served as a control group. Participants were randomly allocated to one of the three conditions through the use of an online survey platform. The data analysis reveals that positive emotional words have a greater impact on both the perceived usefulness and credibility of an online review, in comparison to the negative and mixed condition. Additionally, statistical tests propose that the perceived usefulness of an online review has an impact on users' booking intention, while the construct of perceived credibility does not. This leads to the conclusion that managers should try to encourage or incentivize their previous visitors to write positive reviews that are perceived as useful by potential customers, to increase their future booking intentions. These results contribute to existing literature regarding eWOM, while also

offering an insight into which specific online reviews are most useful to consumers, and, therefore also marketers.